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Retributive Reactions to Suspected Offenders: The Importance of Social Categorizations and Guilt Probability

Jan-Willem van Prooijen
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In the current research, the author investigates the influence of social categorizations on retributive emotions (e.g., anger) and punishment intentions when people evaluate suspected offenders as independent observers. It is argued that information that guilt is certain or uncertain (i.e., guilt probability) has different consequences for retributive reactions to ingroup and outgroup suspects. In correspondence with predictions, results of four experiments showed that people reacted more negatively to ingroup than outgroup suspects when guilt was certain but that people reacted more negatively to outgroup than ingroup suspects when guilt was uncertain. It is concluded that guilt probability moderates the influence of social categorizations on people's retributive reactions to suspected offenders.

Keywords: *retribution; social categorizations; injustice; guilt probability*

In our world, we constantly witness acts of injustice. The media are filled with news on crime and terror, leading laypeople to respond to suspected offenders with strong retributive emotions (e.g., anger, hostility) and punishment intentions (Hogan & Emler, 1981; Miller & Vidmar, 1981). Numerous social factors may influence these retributive reactions to suspected offenders. Most of these social factors are directly connected to the offense, such as severity of the harm done, the extent to which the suspect expresses remorse, and mitigating circumstances (e.g., Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Darley, 2002). However, it also has been suggested that, sometimes, social factors that are less directly related to the specifics of the offense contribute to an observer's moral reactions. One of these latter factors is whether the suspect and the observer share a common group membership. Vidmar (2002) has described numerous anecdotal incidents in which people reacted more punitively to ingroup rather than to outgroup offenders. One

example that he describes in his chapter is how people reacted to members of a Catholic religious order in the Mt. Cashel Orphanage in Newfoundland, Canada. These Catholic members had sexually abused young boys that were under their care. In Newfoundland society, where Catholics and Protestants both are salient religious groups, Catholics expressed a much stronger desire for severe punishment than did Protestants (for details, see Vidmar, 2002).

These assumed effects of social categorizations on people's retributive reactions to suspected offenders are connected to theoretical insights on people's responses to negative ingroup versus outgroup deviants; that is, previous research has discovered that people often perceive unlikable ingroup members more negatively than unlikable outgroup members, a finding that has been referred to as the black sheep effect (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988; for a review, see Marques & Paez, 1994). The black sheep effect has its roots in social identity theory's proposition that people seek to maintain a positive social identity because they derive an important part of their self-worth from their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). One of the strategies that people adopt to maintain a positive social identity is described by the model of subjective group dynamics (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000; Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998; Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001): Ingroup members try to maximize differentiation between their ingroup and relevant outgroups while

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simultaneously trying to normatively differentiate between ingroup members. This process of subjective group dynamics is reflected in research findings that people generally perceive ingroup members as more favorable than outgroup members ("ingroup bias") (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), but at the same time, people derogate ingroup members that do not comply to either specific ingroup norms or generic norms that are embraced by the ingroup. Both ingroup bias and the derogation of unfavorable group members enable ingroup members to sustain a positive association with the group.

Most research on the black sheep effect has focused on ratings of negative deviants in terms of perceived favorability: Participants typically evaluate to what extent they believe that a target deviant has positive or negative traits (for a review, see Marques & Paez, 1994; see also Abrams et al., 2000; Castano, Paladino, Coull, & Yzerbyt, 2002; Eidelman & Biernat, 2003; Marques et al., 1998, 2001). Besides these perceptions, however, it has been noted that the black sheep effect also is likely to generalize to people's moral judgments, that is, their moral emotions and punishment intentions (cf. Kerr, Hymes, Anderson, & Weathers, 1995; Vidmar, 2002). After all, suspected offenders can be regarded as deviants from widely shared societal norms, and laypeople typically respond with strong moral emotions and punishment intentions to these suspected offenders (Carlsmith et al., 2002; Darley, Carlsmith, & Robinson, 2000; Folger, 2001; Goldberg, Lerner, & Tetlock, 1999; Miller & Vidmar, 1981). The current research is focused on these retributive reactions to suspected offenders as a function of social categorizations.

One of the reasons why the present research is focused on retributive reactions is because previous research within the moral domain has produced findings that, at first glance, seem inconsistent with the black sheep effect. For example, in research on the role of race in courtroom settings, findings often show prejudiced responses of White juries to Black suspects and of Black juries to White suspects (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000; cf. Kerr et al., 1995; Sargent & Bradfield, 2004). An illustration of such prejudiced responses can be found in a study by Graham, Weiner, and Zucker (1997). These authors investigated the American public's reactions to O. J. Simpson in the week following his arrest on the accusation of murdering his ex-wife and her male friend. These authors found that African Americans reported less retributive emotions and punishment intentions toward O. J. Simpson than did White Americans. Apparently, the extent to which O. J. Simpson's ethnic group (African American) corresponded to observers' ethnic group influenced observers' retributive reactions to the suspected offender, but in different ways than would be expected

based on the theoretical analysis presented here: People responded more negatively to a suspected outgroup offender rather than to a suspected ingroup offender.

It might be reasoned by some that the O. J. Simpson case was controversial and that this may have influenced the Graham et al. (1997) results. For instance, this specific case had numerous unique characteristics, such as extensive media attention, the fact that the victim was White, and the fact that the suspect was a famous sports hero. However, these unique characteristics are at best only part of the whole picture. Comparable ingroup favorability results have been found in experimental settings where artificially created mock juries attributed more guilt to outgroup suspects (i.e., other race than jury) rather than to ingroup suspects (i.e., same race as jury) (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). Furthermore, research has suggested that these findings are not limited to categorizations based on race. For example, research by Kerr et al. (1995, Exp. 1) has indicated that participants attributed less guilt to a suspect that did versus did not share their religious beliefs. Taken together, these previous research findings suggest that people sometimes display ingroup favoritism toward crime suspects. How can these findings be reconciled with the model of subjective group dynamics, which would predict that people are more punitive to ingroup rather than to outgroup offenders?

In the current research, I focus on a factor that I hypothesize to moderate the influence of social categorizations on people's retributive reactions. This factor is suggested by a striking consistent characteristic in research settings that have revealed ingroup favoring responses to suspected offenders: In those previous research settings, participants typically responded to suspects whose guilt was not yet established with certainty (e.g., Graham et al., 1997; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). This was notably the case in the study by Graham and her colleagues: Although there were many pieces of evidence against O. J. Simpson, and many people were convinced of his guilt, his guilt versus innocence was strongly debated by others.¹ Moreover, in the Sommers and Ellsworth (2000) studies, participants also were presented with scenarios of uncertain guilt probability; in fact, perceived guilt was one of the main dependent variables in these studies (cf. Kerr et al., 1995). Thus, one typical characteristic of situations where people display ingroup favorability to suspected offenders is that the guilt of the suspect is disputable. In the current research, I will refer to the extent to which a suspect's guilt has been proven beyond reasonable doubt as guilt probability.

The idea that variations in guilt probability can determine the influence of social categorizations on people's retributive reactions fits well within the presented theoretical analysis of subjective group dynamics (Abrams

et al., 2000; Marques et al., 1998; Marques et al., 2001). Following this model's proposition that people seek to preserve a positive social identity by normatively differentiating within the group, people are likely to respond particularly negatively to ingroup rather than outgroup offenders as a strategy to maintain a positive association with their group. More specifically, group members are able to symbolically exclude the ingroup offender by displaying strong retributive reactions, thus diminishing the possibility that the rest of the group is regarded as guilty by association (cf. Vidmar, 2002). However, it should be recognized that this strategy is suitable to protect one's positive social identity only when confronted with clear-cut evidence that the ingroup suspect is in fact guilty of the offense. When a suspected offender's guilt is disputable, I propose that people have a better strategy available to preserve positive group distinctiveness. Even when people consider guilt to be equally uncertain for an ingroup and outgroup suspect, they nevertheless are likely to be more concerned about this uncertainty surrounding the suspect's guilt when the suspect is an ingroup member. After all, guilt uncertainty helps people to disassociate their group from the offense, leading them to be relatively more reluctant to display strong retributive reactions to ingroup than outgroup suspects. Indeed, group members may even experience it as imperative to take a relatively more favorable position toward the ingroup than the outgroup suspect because of generic norms that people should be loyal to fellow group members that are in trouble (cf. Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993).

Related to these propositions is an experiment by Kerr et al. (1995, Exp. 2), who manipulated race of a defendant (Black vs. White) and strength of evidence. Their results indicated that jurors attributed more guilt to ingroup suspects when the evidence was strong and more guilt to outgroup suspects when the evidence was weak. The present research extends the Kerr et al. experiment in at least two important ways. First, whereas guilt probability was the dependent variable in the Kerr et al. study, in the current research, guilt probability is operationalized as the independent variable: Orthogonal manipulations ensured that participants perceived guilt as equally certain or uncertain among ingroup and outgroup suspects. Nevertheless, it is expected that this guilt probability information has a more extreme impact on retributive reactions to ingroup than outgroup suspects because social identity concerns lead people to be more concerned about guilt probability of ingroup suspects when determining their retributive reactions. Second, Kerr et al.'s experiment was constrained by a boundary condition: They only found their effect among minority group jurors (i.e., White jurors anticipating a mainly Black jury or Black jurors anticipating a

mainly White jury). In all likelihood, this boundary condition was produced by the complex intergroup situation in their study (i.e., a multiracial mock jury evaluating a Black vs. White suspect). Such a complex intergroup jury situation is not an essential part of the underlying theoretical rationale, and hence—following Ockham's razor, which dictates that scientists should be as parsimonious as possible—I propose that the predicted effects should materialize among observers who do not anticipate these complex, intergroup interactions. As such, the current research mirrors common everyday life situations where laypeople form opinions of crime suspects as independent observers (e.g., such as when reading a newspaper).

The idea that people may display ingroup favoritism in their retributive reactions toward suspected offenders when guilt is uncertain has common ground with findings obtained in related research areas. For example, research on collective guilt has revealed that high identifiers display a defensive reaction to their group's history when a description of this history contains both favorable and unfavorable information: High identifiers experience less guilt about their group's past behaviors than low identifiers if guilt information is ambiguous (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). The research by Doosje and his colleagues is related to the current propositions because by derivation their research suggests that people protect their social identity by defending the honor of fellow group members if the guilt of those fellow group members is ambiguous. Furthermore, research by Boeckmann and Tyler (1997) has revealed that people are less concerned about the provisions of procedural protections if crime suspects are outgroup rather than ingroup members. The finding that people attach more importance to correct legal procedures when determining guilt of ingroup rather than outgroup suspects corresponds to the proposition of the current research that people are more concerned about guilt probability in the case of ingroup suspects when determining what retributive reactions to show.

To summarize, in the current research, I investigate the possibility that observers display stronger retributive reactions to ingroup than outgroup offenders when the suspected offender's guilt turns out to be undisputable. When guilt is uncertain, however, people are not only likely to show less retributive reactions in general (i.e., it stands to reason that people generally are less angry and punitive when guilt is uncertain than when guilt is certain) but also people are expected to show relatively less retributive reactions to ingroup than outgroup suspects. To test this line of reasoning, I present four experiments in which participants were confronted with varying types of offenses. In all experiments, participants learned that the suspected offender either was an ingroup or an

outgroup member. Furthermore, participants received guilt probability information. In Experiments 1 to 3, participants either read that clear-cut pieces of evidence had established the suspect's guilt with 100% certainty (the guilt certain conditions) or that mixed pieces of evidence had established the suspect's guilt with approximately 50% certainty (the guilt uncertain conditions). In Experiment 4, guilt probability was manipulated by providing participants with evidence that either proved the suspect's guilt with certainty or that suggested that guilt was uncertain. In all experiments, I predicted that participants would display more negative retributive reactions to ingroup than outgroup offenders when guilt was certain but that participants would display ingroup favoritism in their retributive reactions when guilt was uncertain. The dependent variables were participants' retributive emotions (Experiments 1 and 2) and their punishment intentions (Experiments 3 and 4).

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Participants and design. The hypothesis was tested in a 2 (suspect categorization: ingroup vs. outgroup) \times 2 (guilt probability: certain vs. uncertain) factorial design. A total of 122 participants (43 men, 79 women), varying in age from 17 to 48 years ($M = 21.00$, $SD = 3.83$), were recruited in the restaurant of the Free University Amsterdam and participated voluntarily. The experiment was preceded by another unrelated study. The studies lasted a total of 45 min and participants were paid 5 euros for participation.

Procedure. Upon entry in the laboratory, participants were led to separate cubicles. In the cubicles, participants found computer equipment, which was used to present the stimulus information and to register the results. Participants were asked to read and evaluate a scenario. To enhance mundane realism, participants were told that the scenario was based on true events at the soccer world championships many years ago. The scenario read as follows (manipulated information is in *italics*):

The Dutch national soccer team has to play against the German national soccer team at the soccer world championships. The evening before the match, the final entrance tickets are being sold illegally on the black market. Profiteers are asking extremely high prices for the illegal entrance tickets. That same night, an individual is accused of illegally selling entrance tickets for exorbitant prices. This individual, who is arrested by the police, turns out to be a *Dutch/ German* soccer fan. The police start an investigation against the *Dutch/ German* suspect.

After this information, I manipulated guilt probability. In the certain condition, participants read the following:

The investigation proves that the suspect is indeed guilty: Based on the clear-cut pieces of evidence, it can be confidently concluded that it is 100% certain that this suspect is in fact guilty of illegally selling entrance tickets.

In the guilt uncertain condition, however, participants received the following information:

The investigation does *not* prove that the suspect is guilty. Based on the mixed pieces of evidence, it can be roughly estimated that there is approximately a 50% chance that this suspect is in fact guilty of illegally selling entrance tickets.

After the guilt probability manipulation, participants responded to the questions that pertained to the dependent variables and manipulation checks. To measure participants' retributive affect toward the suspect, participants responded to the following items (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*): "How angry do you feel toward the suspect?" and "How hostile do you feel toward the suspect?" These two items were strongly correlated ($r = .85$, $p < .001$) and I averaged them into a reliable retributive affect scale ($\alpha = .92$). To check the guilt probability manipulation, participants responded to the following two questions: "How certain is it that the suspect is guilty of illegally selling entrance tickets?" (1 = *very uncertain*, 7 = *very certain*) and "To what extent has the suspect's guilt of illegally selling entrance tickets been proven?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). These two items were strongly correlated ($r = .83$, $p < .001$) and I averaged them into a reliable guilt probability scale ($\alpha = .90$). Finally, to check the suspect categorization manipulation, participants were asked to indicate dichotomously whether the suspect was from the Netherlands or from Germany. After this, participants were debriefed, thanked, and paid for their participation.

Results

Manipulation checks. On the dichotomous check of suspect's categorization, only 1 male participant gave an incorrect answer. This 1 participant was included in the analyses reported below (results were similar when this participant was excluded). These results showed that participants correctly identified whether the suspect was an ingroup or an outgroup member.

On the guilt probability scale, a 2×2 ANOVA showed a significant guilt probability main effect only, $F(1, 118) = 204.52$, $p < .001$. Participants in the guilt certain condition perceived the suspect's guilt as more certain ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 0.96$) than did participants in the guilt uncertain condition ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.00$). Both the suspect categorization main effect and the interaction were nonsignificant ($F_s < 1$). These results showed that participants had perceived the manipulations as intended.

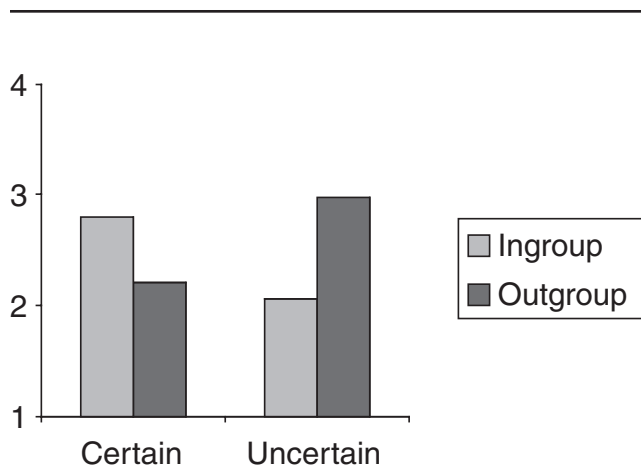


Figure 1 Mean reported retributive affect toward the suspect as a function of guilt probability and suspects' categorization—Experiment 1.

NOTE: Means were measured on 7-point scales. Higher means indicate more reported retributive affect.

Retributive affect. A 2×2 ANOVA on the retributive affect scale did not show any main effects ($F_s < 1$). The absence of a guilt probability main effect was surprising, and in the Discussion I will try to explain why the results did not show this expected main effect. However, more important for the current purposes was that the means showed the predicted flip-over pattern (depicted graphically in Figure 1), leading to a significant interaction, $F(1, 118) = 8.69, p < .01$. When guilt was certain, participants reported more retributive affect toward the ingroup offender ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.31$) than toward the outgroup offender ($M = 2.21, SD = 1.40$), $t(59) = 1.70, p < .05$.² When guilt was uncertain, however, participants reported more retributive affect toward the outgroup suspect ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.58$) than toward the ingroup suspect ($M = 2.06, SD = 1.28$), $t(59) = 2.45, p < .01$. These results corroborated the hypothesis.

Discussion

The results supported the hypothesis that people display more retributive affect to ingroup than outgroup offenders when guilt is certain but that people display less retributive affect to ingroup than outgroup suspects when guilt is uncertain. Although these results were promising, it should be noted that the absence of a guilt probability main effect was surprising and counterintuitive. Despite the fact that manipulation checks showed that the guilt probability manipulation was induced successfully, the results did not show that people reported less retributive affect to an uncertain guilty suspect rather than to a certain guilty offender. How can this peculiarity in the data be explained?

I tentatively argue that the absence of a guilt probability main effect may be explained by the type of offense that was investigated; that is, illegally selling entrance tickets may be regarded as a too mild offense to elicit strong retributive reactions among observers. In the data, this was reflected in the fact that participants' overall level of retributive affect was rather low (on a 7-point scale, overall $M = 2.50, SD = 1.43$). Thus, participants in general did not feel very angry about this offense, even in the guilty condition, and this may have obscured differences in reactions to certain versus uncertain guilty offenders. This explanation for the absence of a guilt probability main effect is speculative, and it is important to obtain additional evidence for the general hypothesis in a second experiment that focuses on a more severe type of offense. In Experiment 2, participants therefore read a scenario that involved stealing money from a company's cashbox.³

EXPERIMENT 2

In Experiment 2, I investigated the hypothesized effects in a minimal group paradigm (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979): Participants imagined that they worked in a company that had either a red or a blue department. In the scenario, a colleague that belonged either to their own or the other department was accused of stealing money, and the suspect's guilt was 100% versus 50% certain. The main dependent variable consisted again of participants' retributive emotions, that is, their ratings of anger and hostility toward the suspect.

Besides the above-mentioned reasons, an additional aim of the second experiment was to rule out an important alternative explanation; that is, it is likely that guilt probability influences the perceived favorability of the suspect: People are expected to perceive a certain guilty suspect as less favorable than an uncertain guilty suspect. It may therefore be the case that the hypothesized effects are attributable to perceived favorability of the target. After all, it is well-known that people derogate unfavorable ingroup members but show ingroup favorability toward favorable ingroup members (Marques & Paez, 1994). I consider this alternative explanation as unlikely, for two reasons. First, even if people perceive an uncertain guilty suspect relatively more favorably than a certain guilty suspect, it is nevertheless not very plausible that people regard a crime suspect as a very favorable or prototypical ingroup member. Second, although retributive reactions may be correlated with person perceptions, it is likely that they represent distinct types of judgments. After all, it is very well possible that people evaluate a suspect negatively and yet display remote retributive reactions due to uncertain guilt probability. To empirically show that the effects of social categorizations and guilt probability on people's moral emotions are indepen-

dent from perceived favorability, I measured participants' perceived favorability toward the suspect.

Method

Participants and design. The hypothesis was again tested in a 2 (suspect categorization: ingroup vs. outgroup) \times 2 (guilt probability: certain vs. uncertain) factorial design. A total of 100 participants were recruited in the restaurant of the Free University Amsterdam. It turned out that 5 participants were senior psychology students (3rd BA year or higher). Because of the knowledge of minimal group paradigms that these students are likely to have, they were not included in the analyses. This left a total of 95 participants (40 men, 55 women), varying in age from 18 to 30 years ($M = 21.26$, $SD = 2.55$). The experiment was preceded by another unrelated study. The experiments lasted 45 min and participants were paid 5 euros for participation.

Procedure. The experiment was conducted in the same laboratory as Experiment 1. Again, computers were used to present the stimulus information and to register the data. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in the following situation (manipulated information in italics):

Imagine that you are an employee in a computer factory. The computer factory has two large departments: a red department and a blue department. You are an employee at the red department. One day it turns out that a large sum of money has been stolen from the company's cashbox. There is an employee named Kees who is being accused of having stolen the money. Kees is an employee working at the *red/blue* department. The management of the computer factory starts an investigation to find out whether Kees, the suspected employee, has indeed stolen the money.

After this, participants read the guilt probability manipulation. In the guilt certain condition, participants read the following information:

The investigation proves that Kees is guilty: Based on the many pieces of evidence it can be concluded that it is 100% certain that Kees is in fact guilty of stealing money from the company's cashbox.

In the guilt uncertain condition, participants read the following information:

The investigation does *not* prove that Kees is guilty: Based on the mixed pieces of evidence it can be concluded that there is approximately a 50% chance that Kees is in fact guilty of stealing money from the company's cashbox.

Following the guilt probability manipulation, participants responded to the dependent measures and the manipulation checks. To measure participants' retributive affect toward the suspect, I asked two similar questions as in Experiment 1 (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*): "How angry do you feel toward Kees?" and "How hostile do you feel toward Kees?" These two questions were again strongly correlated ($r = .87$, $p < .001$) and I averaged them into a reliable retributive affect scale ($\alpha = .93$). Furthermore, to measure how favorably participants perceived the target, participants responded to three questions asking how kind, moral, and sincere they believed that Kees is (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). These three items were averaged into a reliable favorability scale ($\alpha = .79$). To check the guilt probability manipulation, participants were asked the following two questions: "To what extent has it been proven that Kees is guilty of stealing money from the company's cashbox?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) and "How clear is it that Kees is guilty of stealing money from the company's cashbox?" (1 = *very unclear*, 7 = *very clear*). These two questions were strongly correlated ($r = .93$, $p < .001$) and I averaged them into a reliable guilt probability scale ($\alpha = .96$). Finally, to check the suspect categorization manipulation, participants were asked to indicate dichotomously in what department (i.e., the red or the blue department) Kees worked and in what department they themselves worked. After this, participants were debriefed, thanked, and paid for their participation.

Results

Manipulation checks. All participants correctly identified in what department Kees worked, and only 1 male participant incorrectly identified his own department. From these analyses, it can be concluded that the suspect categorization manipulation was induced as intended.

On the guilt probability scale, a 2 \times 2 ANOVA showed a significant guilt probability main effect only, $F(1, 91) = 174.34$, $p < .001$. Participants in the guilt certain condition rated the suspect's guilt to be more probable ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 1.34$) than did participants in the guilt uncertain condition ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.28$). The suspect categorization main effect and the interaction were both nonsignificant ($F_s < 1$). From these analyses, it can be concluded that participants perceived the experimental manipulations as intended.

Retributive affect. A 2 \times 2 ANOVA on the retributive affect scale showed a significant guilt probability main effect, $F(1, 91) = 20.98$, $p < .001$. Participants in the guilt certain condition reported more retributive affect ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.51$) than did participants in the guilt uncertain condition ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.49$). Thus, in contrast to Experiment 1, in this experiment, the data did show the predicted guilt probability main effect. More important

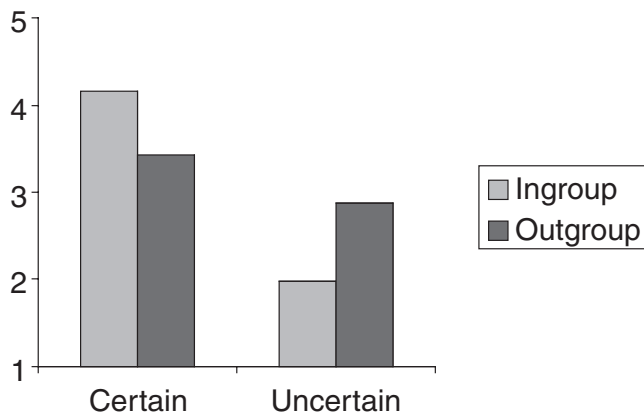


Figure 2 Mean reported retributive affect toward the suspect as a function of guilt probability and suspects' categorization—Experiment 2.

NOTE: Means were measured on 7-point scales. Higher means indicate more reported retributive affect.

was that the pattern of means (depicted graphically in Figure 2) showed the predicted flip-over pattern, leading to a significant interaction, $F(1, 91) = 7.34, p < .01$. When guilt was certain, participants reported more retributive affect toward an ingroup offender ($M = 4.16, SD = 1.39$) than toward an outgroup offender ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.58$), $t(46) = 1.69, p < .05$. When guilt was uncertain, participants reported more retributive affect toward an outgroup suspect ($M = 2.88, SD = 1.49$) than toward an ingroup suspect ($M = 1.98, SD = 1.37$), $t(45) = -2.15, p < .02$. These results correspond to the hypothesis presented in this article.

Perceived favorability. A 2×2 ANOVA on perceived favorability yielded a significant guilt probability main effect only, $F(1, 91) = 39.42, p < .001$. Not surprisingly, participants rated the target as less favorable when guilt was certain ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.79$) than when guilt was uncertain ($M = 4.26, SD = 0.72$). Of importance, both the suspect categorization main effect and the interaction were nonsignificant. In addition, we included perceived favorability as a covariate in a 2×2 ANCOVA with retributive affect as dependent variable, and also, we included retributive affect as a covariate in a 2×2 ANCOVA with perceived favorability as a dependent variable. In both analyses, the covariate was nonsignificant ($F_s < 1$) and the results on the dependent variable in question did not change. These results indicate that the effects of suspect categorization and guilt probability on retributive affect were independent from perceived favorability of the target. Perceived favorability is thus not a convincing alternative explanation of the current results.

Discussion

The results of Experiment 2 again revealed corroborative evidence for the hypothesis that people express stronger retributive emotions toward ingroup than outgroup suspects when guilt is certain but show weaker retributive emotions toward ingroup than outgroup suspects when guilt is uncertain. Of importance, these effects were revealed in a minimal group paradigm, which suggests that the described effects are very powerful and can be found in a variety of situations. Furthermore, in Experiment 2, the predicted guilt probability main effect materialized, resolving the questions that arose from Experiment 1 by inducing a relatively more severe offense. Finally, the experiment revealed that the effects of suspect categorization and guilt probability on moral emotions could not be explained by perceived favorability of the suspect. Based on the results of both experiments, it can be confidently concluded here that the extent to which observers share a group membership with suspected offenders influences the moral emotions that they feel toward the suspect and that this influence is moderated by guilt probability information.

Experiments 1 and 2 have extended the model of subjective group dynamics by integrating the black sheep effect with a number of seemingly inconsistent findings in the moral domain. These two experiments have indicated that guilt probability moderates the influence of social categorizations on people's retributive emotions, that is, their ratings of anger and hostility. These retributive emotions are important dependent variables in the moral domain because these emotions have been argued to shape justice judgments (Haidt, 2001; Van den Bos, 2003) and empirical research has shown that retributive emotions are closely related to punishment intentions (Carlsmith et al., 2002; Darley et al., 2000). To further extend the current findings, in Experiment 3, I investigated whether the hypothesis generalizes to people's punishment intentions. In Experiment 3, I therefore asked participants how severely they believed the suspect should be punished and how just it would be if the offender were severely punished.

EXPERIMENT 3

Method

Participants and design. The hypothesis was again tested in a 2 (suspect categorization: ingroup vs. outgroup) $\times 2$ (guilt certainty: certain vs. uncertain) factorial design. A total of 106 participants (38 men, 68 women), varying in age from 18 to 55 years ($M = 21.08, SD = 5.33$), were recruited in the restaurant of the Free University Amsterdam and participated voluntarily. The experiment was preceded by two other unrelated experi-

ments. The experiments lasted a total of 45 min and participants were paid 5 euros for participation in the experiments.

Procedure. Participants responded to the stimulus information in the same laboratory and on the same computers as in Experiments 1 and 2. Participants were asked to read a paragraph. To enhance mundane realism, participants were told that the paragraph contained a description of a true event that happened some time ago. The paragraph read as follows (manipulated information in *italics*):

Some time ago, bicycles were regularly being stolen from the cycle racks at the Free University of Amsterdam. After some time, a suspect was arrested. This suspect turned out to be a student of the *Free University of Amsterdam/Leiden University*.⁴ An investigation about the potential role of the suspect in the bicycle thefts was started.

After this, participants read the guilt probability manipulation. In the guilt certain condition, participants read the following:

In the investigation, the guilt of the suspect is proven: Based on the many pieces of evidence, it can be concluded that it is 100% certain that this suspect is in fact guilty of stealing bicycles from the Free University's cycle racks.

In the guilt uncertain condition, participants read the following:

In the investigation, the guilt of the suspect is *not* proven: Based on the mixed pieces of evidence, it can be roughly estimated that there is approximately a 50% chance that this suspect is in fact guilty of stealing bicycles from the Free University's cycle racks.

After reading the paragraph, participants responded to the dependent variables and the manipulation checks. The main dependent variables were participants' punishment intentions, which were solicited with the following two items: "How severely do you think the suspect should be punished?" (1 = *not very severely*, 7 = *very severely*) and "How just would it be if the suspect were severely punished?" (1 = *very unjust*, 7 = *very just*). These two items turned out to be strongly correlated ($r = .86$, $p < .001$) and I averaged them into a reliable retributive justice scale ($\alpha = .92$). To measure perceived favorability of the suspect, participants responded to three items asking how kind, trustworthy, and respectable they believed that the suspect is (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). These three items were averaged into a reliable favorability scale ($\alpha = .82$). To check the guilt probability manipulation, participants answered the following two items: "How certain is

it that the suspect is guilty of stealing bicycles?" (1 = *very uncertain*, 7 = *very certain*) and "How clear is it that the suspect is guilty of stealing bicycles?" (1 = *very unclear*, 7 = *very clear*). These two items were strongly correlated ($r = .92$, $p < .001$) and I averaged them into a reliable guilt probability scale ($\alpha = .96$). To check the suspect categorization manipulation, I asked the following two questions (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*): "Was the suspect a student from the Free University Amsterdam?" and "Was the suspect a student from Leiden University?". After this, participants were fully debriefed, thanked, and paid for their participation.

Results

Manipulation checks. A 2×2 MANOVA on the two items to check the suspect categorization manipulation showed a significant main effect of suspect categorization only, both on the multivariate and univariate levels, multivariate $F(2, 101) = 940.00$, $p < .001$; the Free University item $F(1, 102) = 1821.34$, $p < .001$; the Leiden University item $F(1, 102) = 733.66$, $p < .001$. Participants in the ingroup condition agreed more to the statement that the suspect was a student at the Free University Amsterdam ($M = 6.80$, $SD = .71$) and less to the statement that the suspect was a student at Leiden University ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 1.14$) than did participants in the outgroup condition ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 0.64$ and $M = 6.81$, $SD = 0.89$, respectively). These results indicate that participants perceived the suspect categorization manipulation as intended.

A 2×2 ANOVA on the guilt probability scale showed a significant guilt probability main effect only, $F(1, 102) = 251.89$, $p < .001$. Participants in the guilt certain condition rated the suspect's guilt as more probable ($M = 6.46$, $SD = 1.06$) than did participants in the guilt uncertain condition ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.30$). These analyses revealed that the experimental manipulations were successful.

Retributive justice judgments. A 2×2 ANOVA on retributive justice judgments showed a significant guilt probability main effect, $F(1, 102) = 144.95$, $p < .001$. In correspondence with the findings obtained in Experiment 2, participants were more favorable about severe punishments if the suspect's guilt was certain ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.03$) than if the suspect's guilt was uncertain ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.64$). More important was that this analyses also showed a significant interaction, $F(1, 102) = 7.95$, $p < .01$. The pattern of means showed the predicted flip-over pattern, which is depicted graphically in Figure 3. If the suspect's guilt was certain, participants were more favorable about severe punishments if the offender was an ingroup member ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 0.85$) than if the offender was an outgroup member ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(52) = 2.08$, $p < .03$. However, if the suspect's guilt was uncertain, participants were more favorable about severe punishments if the offender was an outgroup member ($M = 3.48$, $SD =$

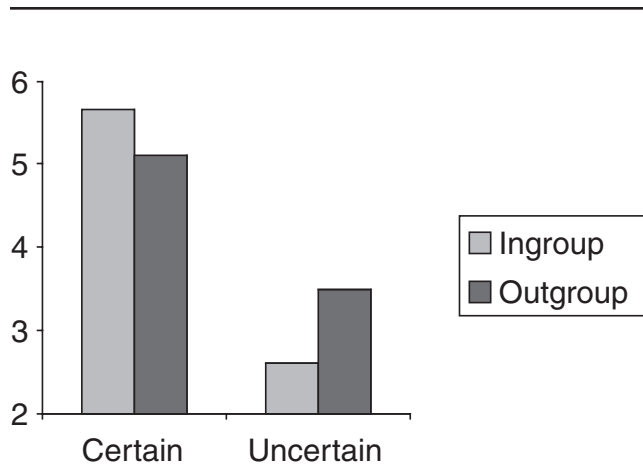


Figure 3 Mean retributive justice judgments as a function of guilt probability and suspects' categorization—Experiment 3.

NOTE: Means were measured on 7-point scales. Higher means indicate stronger punishment intentions.

1.76) than if the offender was an ingroup member ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.41$), $t(50) = 2.00$, $p < .03$. These results again corroborated the hypothesis.

Perceived favorability. A 2×2 ANOVA on perceived favorability of the suspect again yielded a significant guilt probability main effect, $F(1, 102) = 29.12$, $p < .001$. In correspondence with Experiment 2, participants rated the suspect less favorable when guilt was certain ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.84$) than when guilt was uncertain ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.84$). The other effects were nonsignificant. We then included perceived favorability as a covariate in a 2×2 ANCOVA with retributive justice judgments as a dependent variable and retributive justice judgments as a covariate in a 2×2 ANCOVA with perceived favorability as a dependent variable. Although both perceived favorability and retributive justice were significant covariates, the main results did not change (i.e., a significant interaction on retributive justice judgments and no interaction on perceived favorability). These analyses indicate that suspect categorization and guilt probability exert effects on retributive justice judgments that are distinct from the effects on perceived favorability of the suspect. In correspondence with Experiment 2, perceived favorability does not constitute a convincing alternative explanation to the current findings.

Discussion

Experiment 3 again supported the hypothesis and revealed that the predicted effects generalize to people's retributive justice judgments. Taken together, Experiments 1 through 3 provide solid evidence for the line of reasoning presented in the introduction. However, it

should be noted that the results in these three studies were based on an experimentally induced guilt probability manipulation that does not correspond to how people usually gauge guilt probability in everyday life situations (e.g., rarely do people encounter explicit information that guilt is 50% probable). Experiment 4 was designed to replicate the current effects with a more mundane manipulation of guilt probability; that is, in Experiment 4, guilt probability was manipulated by means of evidence that either proved that the suspect was guilty (the guilt certain condition) or that suggested that guilt was uncertain (the guilt uncertain condition). As in Experiment 3, the dependent variable consisted of participants' retributive justice judgments.

EXPERIMENT 4

Method

Participants and design. The design was again a 2 (suspect categorization: ingroup vs. outgroup) $\times 2$ (guilt probability: certain vs. uncertain) factorial design. Participants were 86 Free University students (24 men, 62 women) with ages varying from 18 to 24 years ($M = 19.84$, $SD = 1.54$). The experiment had the format of a brief paper-and-pencil task, and participants who had just participated in other unrelated experiments were asked whether they were willing to participate in the study.

Procedure. Participants read the same bicycle theft scenario as in Experiment 3. However, the guilt probability manipulation was different in Experiment 4. In the guilt certain condition, participants read that video surveillance cameras had recorded the bicycle thefts and that on the tapes it was clearly visible how the suspect was stealing bicycles. In the guilt uncertain condition, participants read that video surveillance cameras had recorded the bicycle thefts but that on the tapes it was unclear whether it was the suspect or someone else who was stealing the bicycles.

To measure retributive justice judgments, participants were asked how fair, just, and correct it would be if the suspect were severely punished (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). These three items were averaged into a reliable retributive justice scale ($\alpha = .98$). To check the guilt probability manipulation, participants were asked how probable and how certain it is that the suspect is guilty (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). These two items were averaged into a reliable guilt probability scale ($\alpha = .95$). Finally, participants were asked dichotomously whether the suspect was a student from the Free University Amsterdam or from Leiden University.

Results

Manipulation checks. On the dichotomous check of suspect's categorization, only 2 participants gave an in-

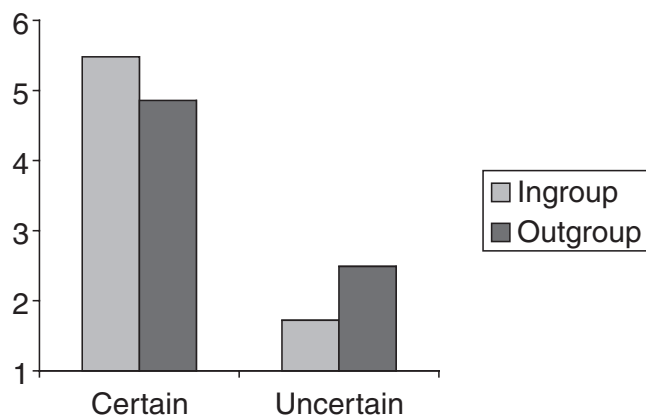


Figure 4 Mean retributive justice judgments as a function of guilt probability and suspects' categorization—Experiment 4.

NOTE: Means were measured on 7-point scales. Higher means indicate stronger punishment intentions.

correct answer (1 in the ingroup and 1 in the outgroup condition). These participants were included in the sample (results were similar when these participants were excluded). These results showed that participants correctly identified the categorization of the suspect.

A 2×2 ANOVA on the guilt probability scale produced a significant guilt probability main effect only, $F(1, 82) = 297.19, p < .001$. Participants perceived guilt as more certain in the guilt certain condition ($M = 6.51, SD = 0.62$) than in the guilt uncertain condition ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.31$). These results revealed that participants had perceived the manipulations as intended.

Retributive justice judgments. A 2×2 ANOVA on retributive justice judgments showed a significant guilt probability main effect, $F(1, 82) = 119.82, p < .001$. In correspondence with Experiments 2 and 3, participants perceived severe punishment as fairer when guilt was certain ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.24$) than when guilt was uncertain ($M = 2.13, SD = 1.42$). More important was that this analysis also produced a significant interaction, $F(1, 82) = 6.23, p < .02$. The means again showed the predicted flip-over pattern, which is depicted graphically in Figure 4. When guilt was certain, participants perceived severe punishment as fairer when the offender was an ingroup member ($M = 5.48, SD = 1.08$) than when the offender was an outgroup member ($M = 4.86, SD = 1.33$), $t(44) = 1.75, p < .05$. When guilt was uncertain, participants perceived severe punishment as more fair when the suspect was an outgroup member ($M = 2.49, SD = 1.71$) than when the suspect was an ingroup member ($M = 1.72, SD = 0.88$), $t(38) = -1.77, p < .05$. These results again corroborated the hypothesis.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of four experiments indicated that people's moral judgments were influenced by a crime suspect's social categorization. Furthermore, these social categorization effects were moderated by the likelihood that the suspect was guilty: If guilt was certain, participants displayed more severe retributive reactions to ingroup than outgroup offenders, but when guilt was uncertain, participants showed less severe retributive reactions to ingroup than outgroup suspects. This pattern was replicated in three types of offensive situations using both experimentally induced and more mundane guilt probability information. Taken together, the present results provided evidence for the notion that people's moral judgments toward suspected offenders are moderated by social categorization and guilt probability in ways that can be deduced from theoretical analyses of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the model of subjective group dynamics (Abrams et al., 2000; Marques et al., 1998; Marques et al., 2001).

On a broader level, the current findings fit into a social justice research tradition that has shown that social structures such as group membership influence issues of morality. Accumulating research has indicated that people's subjective sense of right and wrong is strongly related to social categorizations and group memberships (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998; Tyler & Lind, 1992; van Prooijen, Van den Bos, & Wilke, 2004a, 2004b, in press). Most of this previous justice research had a self-centered perspective on morality because it focused on how group memberships influenced people's perceptions of when they themselves are being unfairly treated (e.g., people's personal experiences of procedural injustice). Thus, whereas previous research has shown that social categorizations shape people's reactions when they themselves are subjected to unfairness, the current research revealed that social categorizations also influence people's sense of morality when they are independent observers of an unjust event. This focus on people's sense of morality when they are observers of unjust events reflects a recent trend in justice research that has emphasized the need to study laypeople's reactions when they observe social transgressions (e.g., Darley & Pittman, 2003; Feather, 1998; Finkel & Sales, 1997; Skitka & Crosby, 2003).

The research reported here revealed only a guilt probability main effect on participants' perceptions of guilt (see the manipulation check findings across experiments). Thus, participants in the uncertain conditions did not perceive ingroup offenders as less guilty than outgroup offenders. Nevertheless, uncertain guilt probability did lead participants to be more lenient in their retributive reactions toward ingroup than outgroup suspects. These findings suggest that even when people

consider guilt to be equally probable for ingroup and outgroup suspects, they nevertheless are more concerned about guilt probability in the case of ingroup than outgroup suspects. After all, guilty ingroup offenders reflect negatively on the group (Abrams et al., 2000; Marques et al., 1998; Marques et al., 2001) and, hence, the question of whether the ingroup suspect is guilty has implications for people's social identity. Because of these self-relevant implications, certain versus uncertain guilt indications may lead to more extreme retributive reactions in the case of ingroup rather than outgroup suspects, a proposition that was supported by the current experiments.

This causal influence of guilt probability on retributive reactions to ingroup and outgroup suspects constitutes an important extension of previous work by Kerr et al. (1995), who focused on perceived guilt as a dependent variable. Moreover, the present research has indicated that the boundary conditions identified in the Kerr et al. study (i.e., Kerr et al. only found their effects among minority group jurors in a multiracial mock jury) are not necessary to find effects of social categorizations and guilt probability on retributive reactions. After all, a series of four experiments indicated that the predicted effects emerged among independent observers who did not anticipate complex intergroup interactions. These considerations suggest that guilt probability and social categorizations exert unique and powerful effects on retributive reactions, a proposition that is further strengthened by the finding that the effects emerged in a minimal intergroup situation (Experiment 2). These findings may have important implications in many real-life circumstances, both for jurors in a court trial and for laypeople who form impressions of crime suspects.

The present experiments focused on moderate offenses that did not cause extreme levels of harm (i.e., illegally selling entrance tickets, stealing money from a company, stealing bicycles). I did not incorporate very severely offensive stimulus materials to avoid ceiling effects. Research has shown preliminary evidence that punishment intentions can be influenced by social factors in the case of moderate offenses but less so in the case of severe offenses (Rucker, Polifroni, Tetlock, & Scott, 2004). In a similar vein, a severe offense might lead to extreme retributive reactions, presumably obscuring any moderating effects of social categorizations (to illustrate, both ingroup and outgroup serial killers are likely to elicit extreme retributive reactions). This problem originates from the apparent strong effects of offense severity on retributive reactions but does not imply that people do not experience identity threats when ingroup members commit severe offenses. It might be the case that extremely severe offenses lead people to seek additional ways to symbolically exclude the offender, such as

dehumanization. Given that severity is a factor of obvious importance whenever studying reactions to offenders, these ideas point at challenging opportunities for further study.

In a recent study, Wenzel (2004) has proposed that people may have different motivations to punish ingroup versus outgroup offenders. In his research, Wenzel distinguished between two forms of punishment reactions to transgressors: a competitive and a cooperative form. The competitive form states that people punish offenders to restore a moral balance by reducing the offender's status and power relative to the victim and society. The cooperative form emphasizes that people punish offenders to restore the validity of the values that have been violated. The results of Wenzel's study indicated that people endorse the cooperative motive for punishment relatively more when they share a social identification with an offender, but people pursue the competitive motive relatively more when they do not share a social identification with an offender. This study suggested that people may display retributive reactions to ingroup versus outgroup offenders for different reasons: In the case of ingroup offenders, people seek to confirm the values that are considered to be important within the group, but in the case of outgroup offenders, people seek to degrade the status of the offender. Clearly, more research is needed to investigate the idea that social categorizations activate differential motivations to punish.

To conclude, the present studies contribute to scientists' understanding of laypeople's reactions to suspected offenders. Four studies have shown that social categorizations and guilt probability influence independent observer's moral reactions to suspected offenders: When guilt is certain, people display more retributive affect and punishment intentions toward ingroup than outgroup offenders, but when guilt is uncertain, people display ingroup favorability toward the ingroup suspect. It can therefore be concluded that social categorizations and guilt probability are important moderators of people's retributive reactions to suspected offenders.

NOTES

1. In fact, the room for reasonable doubt eventually proved to be sufficient for the jury to find O. J. Simpson not guilty; of importance, this acquittal took place after Graham and her colleagues had collected their data.

2. Given that I tested a very specific hypothesis, the *t* tests reported in this article are one-tailed.

3. In a pilot study, I tested among 91 participants (36 men, 55 women, ages varying from 18 to 46 years) how severely they rated the three offenses of the four experiments (1 = *not very severe*, 7 = *very severe*). A repeated-measures analysis revealed that the three offenses differed in perceived severity, $F(2, 89) = 78.48, p < .001$, with the offense of Experiment 1 being less severe ($M = 3.31, SD = 1.51$) than those of Experiment 2 ($M = 5.29, SD = 1.28$) and Experiments 3 and 4 ($M = 4.40, SD = 1.60$). The contrast testing severity of the Experiment 1 offense

versus severity of the Experiment 2 through 4 offenses was significant, $F(1, 90) = 82.46, p < .001$.

4. Leiden University is located relatively close to the Free University of Amsterdam: It takes only 35 min in public transport to travel from Leiden University to the Free University of Amsterdam. Furthermore, it is very common for students in the Netherlands to take one or two courses at a different university than one's own. Thus, the mere presence of a Leiden University student at the Free University Amsterdam is not suspicious in itself.

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